

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 13566

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV SHUM EG
SUBJECT: PERSONAL STATUS LAW

1. ONE OF EGYPT'S LEADING FEMINISTS AMINA EL SAID
(PRESIDENT OF DAR EL HILAL PUBLISHING HOUSE) TOLD EMBOFFS
MAY 23 THERE LITTLE HOPE OF PEOPLES ASSEMBLY PASSING
EFFECTIVE NEW PERSONAL STATUS LAW THIS YEAR. MINISTER
OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS AMAL OSMAN SHOWED HER DRAFT GOVERNMENT
INTENDS INTRODUCE WHICH, REPORTEDLY, IS SEVERAL HUNDRED
PAGES LONG AND STILL FAILS ADDRESS ADEQUATELY WOMEN'S
PRIMARY CONCERNS.

2. DRAFT BILL WOULD NOT GIVE JUDICIARY RIGHT ADJUDICATE
DIVORCES; THEY WOULD BE "REGISTERED" BY COURTS AFTER
HUSBAND COMPLIED WITH SHARIYA PROVISIONS. RIGHT TO
ALIMONY EXTENDED ONLY TO TWO YEARS FROM CURRENT ONE.
CUSTODY RIGHTS, HOWEVER, CONSIDERABLY ENHANCED AND
MOTHERS WOULD RETAIN CHILDREN UNTIL AGE 15. ADDITIONALLY,
WIVES WOULD OBTAIN RIGHT TO DIVORCE HUSBANDS IF THEY TAKE
SECOND WIFE. LEGAL AGE FOR MARRIAGE RAISED FROM 16 TO
18 FOR GIRLS AND FROM 18 TO 20 FOR BOYS.

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3. EL SAID URGED MINISTER PUT MORE TEETH IN DIVORCE AND
ALIMONY PROVISIONS AND SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS BE INTRO-
DUCED SEPARATELY IN PEOPLES ASSEMBLY. FURTHER, SHE TOLD
MINISTER WOMEN WOULD PREFER PACKAGE BE DELAYED UNLESS
PASSAGE CERTAIN SINCE IT EXTREMELY DIFFICULT GET ANY
LEGISLATION ON THIS SUBJECT BEFORE PARLIAMENT. IF BILL
DEFEATED OR SUBSEQUENTLY WATERED DOWN, CURRENT GENERA-

TION UNLIKELY SEE SIGNIFICANT REFORM IN THEIR
LIFETIME.

4. EL SAID DOES NOT THINK PASSAGE LIKELY. SHEIKH OF
AL AZHAR ADAMANTLY OPPOSED AND EL SAID DOUBTS SALEM WILL
BE WILLING TO PUSH HIM. SHE DOES NOT THINK MANY MP'S
WILL STAND UP AGAINST RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENT AND SAID
HER ONLY HOPE IS TO PERSUADE SADAT TO PERSONALLY BACK
BILL. SHE WILL BE DISCUSSING THIS WITH JIHAN SADAT,
ONCE UNIVERSITY EXAMINATIONS COMPLETED. MATTHEWS

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